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PROVISIONAL SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 18th MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Wednesday, 2 July 2003, at 3 p.m.

President:	Mr. ROSENTHAL	(Guatemala)
later:	Mr. HUSSEIN (Vice-President)	(Ethiopia)
later:	Mr. ROSENTHAL (President)	(Guatemala)

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PROMOTING AN INTEGRATED APPROACH TO RURAL DEVELOPMENT IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES FOR POVERTY ERADICATION AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT (continued)

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The meeting was called to order at 3.10 p.m.

PROMOTING AN INTEGRATED APPROACH TO RURAL DEVELOPMENT IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES FOR POVERTY ERADICATION AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT (agenda item 2) (continued) (E/2003/33 and 51; E/2003/L.9 and E/2003/NGO/1)

Mr. ABDALLAH (Nigeria) associated his delegation with the statement made by the Moroccan delegation on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, and said that the persistence of poverty and hunger in the midst of plenty constituted a blight on the collective conscience. Hitherto, the political will to remedy the situation had been lacking. Urgent steps should be taken to give practical expression to the determination shown by the Heads of State and Government at the World Summit on Sustainable Development. While the efforts made by developing countries to promote rural development were essential, international support and a favourable external environment were also crucial.

His Government had made efforts to promote an integrated approach to rural development, based on people-centred policy frameworks, capacity-building and infrastructure development and designed to encourage the establishment of small-scale production activities that generated wealth and employment. A significant number of rural farmers had benefited from the various programmes and arrangements that had been put in place in rural areas, such as a national poverty eradication programme, an agricultural cooperative and rural development bank, an action committee against AIDS, a universal basic education programme and a food security programme.

While welcoming the dialogue undertaken with the Bretton Woods institutions and the World Trade Organization (WTO), the Nigerian delegation urged the Council to consider initiating a similar dialogue with representatives of the Paris and London Clubs, with a view to alleviating the debt burden of the developing countries. It also hoped that the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) would result in concrete and coordinated action. Nigeria would continue its efforts to integrate poverty eradication and food security in its rural development policies by promoting well-targeted, cost-effective and demand-driven programmes and services for the rural poor.

Mr. CHIARADIA (Argentina) said that he wished to associate his delegation with the statement made by the Moroccan delegation on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. Rural development required an approach that was both integrated, in terms of taking into account the various aspects of the problem and the actors involved, and coherent, in terms of complementing and supporting national efforts with a favourable environment. To that end, the negotiations on trade in agricultural products currently in progress at WTO must be concluded quickly, in keeping with the mandate set out in the Doha Ministerial Declaration. The current multilateral system had resulted in the coexistence of, on the one hand, a few developed countries that subsidized their exports and aided their producers, and on the other, a large number of developing countries whose interests did not always coincide, but which were united in their determination to eliminate trade barriers and improve their market access. In order for the Doha Round to make progress, it was vital for the developed countries to demonstrate their political will by gradually eliminating their subsidies and supports. The prospects for that were not very encouraging, although the European Union decision on the reform of the common agricultural policy might be considered a step in the right direction. Clearly, however, other actors within the international community, including developing countries and civil society organizations, could help to improve the situation by putting forward their arguments. In any case, there was no reason why, in today's world, agriculture should be subsidized while other sectors of the economy were not. The elimination of subsidies and tariff barriers would enable Argentina to increase the value of its farm exports by 5 billion dollars, which would obviously have a beneficial effect on its external trade balance, given that it was crippled by a burden of debt it could not service - a situation fraught with consequences in terms of the impoverishment of its rural population. In the interests of a coherent policy, it should be recognized that the elimination of hunger and poverty depended upon the rural development of the developing countries, which was impossible while a trade system persisted that unjustly penalized producers in the developing world.

Mr. WISNUMURTI (Observer for Indonesia) said that he too wished to associate his delegation with the statement made by the Moroccan delegation on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. Noting that social, economic and environmental issues constituted the three pillars of rural development, he pointed out that while a good deal of time had been devoted to social and environmental issues, economic issues had not received the attention they deserved. That was

particularly true with regard to infrastructure development and the creation of jobs and income-generating activities. It was particularly important to develop a road network in rural areas that would allow for the transport of agricultural products to markets, and to introduce appropriate environment-friendly technology to such areas.

However, that approach depended upon an investment of resources. Developed countries should therefore honour the commitment they had made at the International Conference on Financing for Development in Monterrey (Mexico) by substantially increasing their official development assistance (ODA). They should also dismantle their subsidies and tariff barriers so as to allow developing countries, especially the highly indebted ones, to gain access to their markets and, in so doing, to develop their agricultural sector. The Indonesian delegation applauded the recent decision taken by the European Union, which, if effectively implemented, would have a meaningful impact on rural development. In recognition of the fact that it was important for the poor themselves to become actively involved in the rural development process, in 2001 Indonesia had adopted legislation on regional autonomy and decentralization, which enabled rural people to take decisions that were tailored to their needs and priorities.

Indonesia's progress in the area of rural development had been interrupted by the crisis of 1997. Consequently, it needed the assistance of the international community to continue its efforts and to reduce disparities between the regions. The world economic order should be reoriented in such a way as to be responsive to the needs of rural people, in particular through the creation of an enabling environment and the strengthening of global partnerships.

Mr. SHARMA (Nepal) associated his delegation with the statement made by the Moroccan delegation. It was pleasing to note that rural development, which had been rejected in the 1990s in favour of the prevailing illusion that globalization would lead to universal prosperity, was once again back on the agenda. In order to break the vicious cycle that kept rural communities poor, it was necessary to encourage the agricultural sector to produce more food and cash crops, preserve water and forest resources, provide education and health services and build infrastructure. All of that required, on the one hand, continuous efforts to harness local resources and knowledge and mobilize the local popu'ation, and, on the other, the creation of an enabling environment at both the national and international levels.

His Government had allocated nearly 70 per cent of its development budget to rural areas. It had launched a long-term plan for agriculture whose components included small farm development, microcredit for women, cooperatives, high-yield inputs and agro-based industry. In 1990 it had begun to provide a modest grant to every village to be used for local development projects. It had offered concessions to businesses that were set up in rural areas and had liberalized its economic policies. Nepal had one of the lowest tariffs on agricultural products. No sooner had those policies begun to bear fruit than Maoist insurgency had plunged the country into five years of violence that had resulted in a considerable setback. The violence had substantially declined since the ceasefire agreement of 29 January 2003, but Nepal needed additional assistance from the international community to reactivate rural development and especially to develop basic infrastructure and create jobs. It also needed free access to the markets of the rich countries and, to the extent possible, of other developing countries, as well as a fast-track procedure for admission to WTO. The Nepalese delegation was grateful to the development partners who had taken measures to honour their commitments in that regard, and urged others to do likewise.

Mr. DUBE (Observer for Botswana) said that rural development had always been an integral part of his country's planning strategies, given that approximately 75 per cent of the population still lived in rural areas. In 1973 a rural development policy had come into effect, aimed at improving the living conditions of people in rural areas through better agricultural development, provision of infrastructure and services, and promotion of rural industries. However, the policy had not quite succeeded in its aims of strengthening the rural economy and attracting private investment into rural areas, accomplishment of which would have helped to increase food production, provide employment and stem migration to the cities. Botswana had therefore decided in 2002 to review its rural development policy and focus on empowerment of rural communities, a diversified approach to rural development, flexible and integrative land use, reform of the land tenure system, adoption of modern agricultural techniques, and especially the creation of an environment conducive to attracting young people to agriculture. Recent research indicated that the implementation of programmes based on that policy had had a positive impact, poverty rates having declined from 59 per cent of the population in 1985/86 to 47 per cent in 1993/94 and 36.7 per cent in 2001.

Unfortunately, the drought which southern Africa had been experiencing in the last few years had had an extremely adverse impact on rural development, as rural communities were always the first victims of such disasters. He urged the Council to examine at its current session the effects of drought and other natural calamities in order to determine what measures could be adopted by the international community to assist those regions most frequently afflicted. The AIDS pandemic, which had had a devastating social and economic impact in rural areas, was also a real international challenge. Botswana had adopted a national programme based on education and prevention, access to antiretroviral therapy for all, home-based care, prevention of mother-to-child transmission and care of children orphaned by AIDS.

Mr. AL-MALKI (Qatar) endorsed the statement made by the observer for Morocco on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. He noted that although the United Nations had achieved appreciable results in consolidating peace and security, economic and social questions had not attracted the necessary attention on the part of the international community. Crushing poverty afflicted most of the countries of the third world, where, following a steady decline in income in the past 15 years, at least one third of the population did not have sufficient access to food, drinking water or most basic services. The World Bank estimated that if that trend continued, the number of the world's poor would increase from 1.5 billion today to 1.9 billion in 2015. Given that state of affairs, it had become urgently necessary to address the root causes of poverty by taking resolute action to create jobs and income in rural areas and invest in basic social services, such as health care, education, housing and the supply of drinking water.

Deepening poverty in the developing countries was linked to unemployment, which on average exceeded 10 per cent in both urban and rural areas. Hence the need, in addition to job-creation programmes, to mobilize the entrepreneurial capacities of people in rural areas, improve occupational training and gear education to employment. At international level, every effort must be made to reverse the underlying decline in ODA, which for the least developed countries (LDCs) - already burdened by massive debt - was the sole way of tapping development resources. Trade being the driving force behind growth and one of the main sources of income for the LDCs, the international community must work to reduce agricultural subsidies and

eliminate obstacles to developi ountry exports. In closing, he said that the situation of poor people in rural areas required the international community to review all development policies, promote equity and justice, put an end to the marginalization of women and protect the rights of the most vulnerable groups.

Mr. Hussein (Ethiopia) took the Chair.

Mr. GHAFFAR (Egypt) associated his delegation with the statement made by the observer for Morocco on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. Noting that agriculture was the main source of employment and income in the developing countries, he stressed how important the promotion of rural development was for economic growth and the fight against poverty. Well aware of that fact, the Egyptian Government had early on sought to modernize rural infrastructures, develop irrigation, exploit animal husbandry resources, focus on the occupational training of women and promote the financing of small rural businesses. At regional level, Egypt, which was one of the founding members of NEPAD and was in charge of the agricultural component of that initiative, held training courses for experts from other African countries to help them improve the design and implementation of sustainable development policies.

Unfortunately, all those efforts might well be vitiated by the drop in the prices of basic commodities. The resulting decline in income meant that developing countries had difficulty meeting the needs of their populations in the areas of education, health care and housing, and in finding resources for the public investment needed for economic growth. That situation was exacerbated by the lack of a social safety net to guarantee a minimum standard of living. The international community must thus work in the short term to stem the decline in commodity prices and, in the medium and long term, to help developing countries diversify their economies. The commitments entered into at a number of United Nations summits must be honoured, notably with regard to environmental management, the fight against hunger, the reduction in agricultural subsidies and the elimination of trade barriers.

Mr. STEINER (Observer for the World Conservation Union - IUCN) said that the eradication of poverty and hunger must be addressed in conjunction with environmental stability and social development goals. Rural development strategies should not jeopardize the environmental assets and biodiversity on which the majority of the poor depended for their

survival. The access of the rural poor, particularly traditional and indigenous communities, to natural resources should be improved, their use rights should be protected and they should be involved in decisions that had an impact on the environment. Given the absence of those principles from previous development policies, IUCN urged States to incorporate them into their new sustainable development strategies. The international community had a duty to create the conditions necessary for sustainable development, particularly within the framework of the Doha Round of multilateral trade negotiations, which was of fundamental importance for the rational management and use of natural resources. The Economic and Social Council had a leading role to play in coordinating United Nations activities system-wide with a view to ensuring an integrated approach to rural development. It was now necessary to link those activities with the finance and trade agendas pursued by WTO and the Bretton Woods institutions, without which sustainable development and poverty eradication would not be possible. IUCN was eager to work with the United Nations system to promote an integrated approach to rural development.

Mr. Rosenthal (Guatemala) resumed the Chair.

Ms. MAMMADOVA (Azerbaijan) said that a number of measures had been taken to promote rural development in her country, in which agriculture was the principal source of employment and income. As well as the National Programme for Poverty Reduction and Economic Growth, the Government had adopted an agricultural development programme for the period 2002-2006, and a programme for the development of small and medium-sized enterprises for 2002-2005. Tax incentives had been given to agricultural entrepreneurs, and microcredit, consulting and insurance facilities encouraged. Importance had also been placed on information and communication technology, energy, and basic education and health services. Supplying energy to the rural population was an extremely complicated and costly operation, given that many people lived in remote and inaccessible areas. While the Government had adopted a national programme to develop alternative energy sources, technical and financial assistance from the international community was needed to implement it. Azerbaijan was in general need of international assistance to ensure sustainable rural development, particularly as it had to contend with the disruptive effects of aggression by a neighbouring State. A fifth of the national territory, most of which was fertile land, was under foreign occupation, and there were over a million refugees and internally displaced persons, most of them living in extreme poverty. As a

landlocked country in economic transition, Azerbaijan also needed preferential access to markets in the developed world, and it was to be hoped that the Almaty Programme of Action on landlocked developing countries, once adopted, would encourage WTO to give serious consideration to that issue. In conclusion, she announced that, in a spirit of cooperation, Azerbaijan withdrew its reservation to paragraph 16 of the draft ministerial declaration (E/2003/L.9) and joined consensus on the text. It should be noted, however, that for the Republic of Azerbaijan, the term "vulnerable groups" included refugees and internally displaced persons.

Mr. DORJI (Bhutan) said that in spite of the daunting challenges it faced as a landlocked country with a rugged terrain and a scattered population, Bhutan had obtained encouraging results in its efforts to eradicate poverty and ensure sustainable development. Good governance, sustainable socio-economic development, environmental protection and the preservation of culture and traditions were the main components of the philosophy underpinning that work. Various measures were being taken to improve access to rural areas, increase self-reliance, create employment and address rural-urban migration. Devolution of power had led to villagers designing and implementing their own development programmes and enjoying autonomy in fiscal and administrative matters. Bhutan remained committed to the Brussels Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries, and urged the international community to maintain its support of the goals of that programme. Developed countries should also increase their ODA contributions, without which poor countries would be unable to achieve the Millennium Development Goals.

Mr. ESSEL (Ghana) said that measures had been taken to transform the Ghanaian rural economy. The Government was striving to reduce poverty by increasing agricultural production, especially food crops, through the expansion of infrastructure, effective marketing and the provision of extension services. Its goal was to change the view that agricultural activity was simply a way of life, instead presenting it as a profitable commercial occupation.

The prime objective for education was to achieve near-universal literacy and to provide all children with basic education. With regard to health, the medium-term strategy emphasized not only the expansion of health and medical facilities, but also the provision of adequate food supplies, safe drinking water and sanitation.

As part of Ghana's decentralization policy, a common fund had been established at the district assembly level to finance development projects and assist small- and medium-sized enterprises. The Ministry of Women's and Children's Affairs had set up a microfinancing fund aimed specifically at women. The Government was also urgently developing a national strategy to remove obstacles to the delivery of financial services.

Ghana continued to be concerned by the lack of market access for its export products, trade-distorting support mechanisms and export subsidies in developed countries. It was to be hoped that the Fifth WTO Ministerial Conference, in Cancún (Mexico) would facilitate the implementation of commitments regarding trade-related technical assistance and capacity-building for developing countries. Ghana would also like to see an increase in ODA and genuine debt relief.

Mr. HAMAIMA (Libyan Arab Jamahiriya) said that he wished to associate his delegation with the statement made at the previous meeting by the representative of Morocco on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. Libya had realized long ago that sustainable growth and development required a judicious exploitation of local resources and had consequently devised a long-term economic and social plan. Each of the 32 regions created as a result of decentralization had its own planning council with responsibility for rural development. A Rural Bank with a capital of 100 million Libyan dinars granted loans to low-income families for projects aimed at increasing agricultural production and availability of food staples and provided assistance in setting up cooperatives. Every effort was made to encourage investment in rural productive sectors so as to attract city-dwellers to rural areas.

Access to social protection programmes and to health services had been expanded to include all persons in rural areas. Measures had been taken to protect fully the rights of women, who accounted for 17 per cent of the agricultural labour force. His country had undertaken an ambitious programme to develop its water resources that included the construction of 28 dams to supply drinking water to coastal cities and to irrigate agricultural areas. Numerous power plants had been set up in rural areas.

In the context of international cooperation, the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya had recently signed an agreement with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) in which it had pledged US$ 14 million for the implementation of food security projects in five African countries, in addition to other African projects in which it already participated.

Mr. DEMBRI (Observer for Algeria) associated his delegation with the statement made by the representative of Morocco on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. Noting that the current international economic and social climate remained worrying, he said that the reforms undertaken by the developing countries, which involved enormous sacrifices at the political and social levels, had not received the expected level of support from the international community.

The issue of poverty had been one of the central concerns of the United Nations system since the World Summit for Social Development held in Copenhagen in 1995. The mid-term review carried out in 2000 had been lukewarm, to say the least. Not only had the percentage of persons living in poverty not declined, it had actually increased. The list of LDCs had grown and included new countries that had been driven by economic vicissitudes to extreme insecurity. He wondered what could be done to halt the destitution that, particularly in Africa, had reached intolerable levels.

The reports of the Secretary-General and the Committee for Development Policy contained partial solutions for managing, at the national and international levels, the development problems specifically affecting rural populations. Nevertheless, the rapidly increasing impoverishment of rural communities in the developing countries gave reason to doubt whether the Millennium Development Goals could in fact be attained by 2015. For instance, the absence of financial contributions to the World Solidarity Fund, which had been created in the aftermath of the World Summit on Sustainable Development to provide aid to the most destitute, clearly revealed a lack of political will on the part of the international community. The same could be said for the "development contract" project formulated by the Working Group on the Right to Development, which was still awaiting implementation.

Mr. MORAN (Observer for Peru) said that all partners in the fight against poverty had to answer the question how best to implement the recommendations and commitments formulated during the principal world summits. The developing countries should have at their

disposal the resources needed to carry out essential programmes aimed at gradually reducing poverty in rural areas (social services, education, infrastructure, etc.). The international organizations must be given greater budgetary resources in order to avoid cutting back on cooperation aid, particularly South-South cooperation. For their part, the developed countries must ensure coherence between their cooperation policies and their macroeconomic policies, especially in the financial and trade-related fields.

The subsidies and obstacles that hindered access to the markets of the developed countries should be eliminated. In that connection, it was important for the Andean Community to conclude negotiations that would lead to the signing of a political cooperation agreement with the European Union. Ideally, globalization should favour the emergence of domestic markets in the developing countries and should enable them to become fully-fledged actors in world trade and in the spread of knowledge, science and technology. The establishment of sound national economies and of viable democratic regimes could not take place without the active participation of the private sector in integrated development programmes, as well as industrial peace, which entailed the elimination of extreme poverty.

Mr. MAGARIÑOS (United Nations Industrial Development Organization - UNIDO) said that he wished to emphasize two points: first, the need to develop agricultural product processing activities within rural communities; and secondly, the need to diversify into non-farm activities. The aim was to stimulate income-generating productive capacities with a view to promoting sustainable local markets. Recognizing the centrality of agro-industrial development to integrated rural development, UNIDO concentrated its expertise on that sector and offered specialized support in industries such as textiles, leather, food processing, wood processing and fisheries. Its services involved the upgrading of production technology, capacity-building and the establishment of market linkages. They routinely included components relating to the adoption of cleaner production measures, the treatment of effluents and the minimization of industrial waste.

The integrated approach adopted by UNIDO was aimed at enhancing developing countries' productivity and stimulating their growth by offering them "made to measure" technical cooperation programmes covering the full spectrum of support services required for the

establishment of policies and institutions. The Organization would also offer services, where appropriate, at the enterprise level. Those technical cooperation services were supplemented by targeted research activities.

Mr. LANGMORE (International Labour Organization - ILO) said that productive employment was the route out of rural poverty and was as essential to human survival, security and dignity as food or water, even if it had long been sacrificed in the name of price stability and balance of payments equilibrium.

Two examples could be used to illustrate ways of strengthening the focus on rural employment. The first was access to savings and investment. Historically, it was the growth of agricultural productivity, and the concomitant transfer of the labour force to other types of work, that had led to the growth of human societies; hence the importance attached to policies aimed at extending and promoting off-farm rural activities and facilitating access to credit on favourable terms. Such initiatives included the establishment of microcredit schemes, especially for women - which would be particularly effective if the interest rates applied were low - and the establishment of cooperative financial, marketing and supply organizations. Experience had also shown the benefits of promoting employment through the use of labour-intensive techniques for the construction of local infrastructure.

Introducing employment-generating policies and practices through action by the Governments, companies, international institutions and communities concerned was less difficult than was generally supposed the principal requirement being a real determination to take action.

In concluding, he wished to pay a warm tribute to Mr. Desai, who was participating for the last time at a session of the Economic and Social Council in his capacity as Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs.

Ms. BELLAMY (International Confederation of Free Trade Unions) said that, according to ILO estimates, 1.1 billion persons worked in agriculture, of which 450 million were in waged employment. Working and living conditions for the majority of those workers were, to say the least, poor. The situation of waged employment in the context of the current agricultural crisis and constraints to rural sector productivity growth were matters of particular concern for rural areas. The creation of an enabling environment for sustainable development at the

international level was crucial. She therefore wished to make some general policy recommendations, which included implementation of employment policies that ensured decent working conditions; a transition to sustainable patterns of agricultural production; implementation of food security policies based on small-scale local production; measures to improve access of rural populations, especially women, to natural resources, extension services and microcredit; the establishment of labour-intensive development schemes; measures to combat diseases that debilitated rural populations; and, last but not least, the promotion of a regulatory framework whereby countries ratified and implemented the relevant ILO instruments to promote decent working conditions and combat child labour in the rural sector.

Adoption of the ministerial declaration

The PRESIDENT, invited the Council to consider the draft ministerial declaration of the High-level Segment (E/2003/L.9) and to put forward any observations in relation to the document. He pointed out that in line 2 of paragraph 11 of the English version the word "eradication" should be inserted after "poverty". He took it that the Council wished to adopt the draft as it stood.

It was so decided.

The PRESIDENT in summing up the outcome of the three-day debate in the High-level Segment, said that the quality of the representatives of States and United Nations agencies who had participated reflected the importance of a debate of that kind. In addition to a continuation of the dialogue with the Bretton Woods institutions, WTO and other United Nations bodies such as the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, the participation of representatives of civil society, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and business interests, inter alia in the various round table discussions, also deserved to be singled out.

On the substance, the Council had reverted to an already well-known topic from a new angle, on the basis of experience gained over time and the outcomes of major United Nations conferences and summits, in particular the World Food Summit in Rome, the International Conference on Financing for Development in Monterrey (Mexico) and the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg.

The most important conclusion to be drawn from the debate and the ministerial declaration was that promotion of rural development was crucial to achieving the Millennium Development Goals on poverty reduction. Macroeconomic stability, sound government policies, a strong focus on microeconomic issues and active participation of the communities concerned were all necessary. An integrated approach to rural development also presupposed access by rural populations to natural resources, financing, technology, physical and institutional infrastructure, and to national, regional and international markets. In that connection, emphasis had been placed on the need for the progressive elimination of agricultural subsidies in developed countries and the removal of barriers to trade in agricultural products. Cross-disciplinary issues, including the situation of women and vulnerable groups, access to social services and the link between rural development and HIV/AIDS, had also been addressed. Participants had underlined the importance of promoting the establishment of new partnerships between the United Nations and other institutions that worked in the field of rural development. It was planned to review progress made, or the lack thereof, in the implementation of the declaration in 2005.

After thanking Mr. Desai, Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs, for his outstanding contribution to the work of the Economic and Social Council and wishing him every success for the future, he declared the High-level Segment of the substantive session of 2003 closed.

The meeting rose 6.10 p.m.